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HOUSEKEEPERS' CHAT

Thursday, January 15, 1931.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "A Long Life for Kitchenware." Approved by the Bureau of Home Economics, U. S. D. A.

Bulletin available: "Housecleaning Made Easier."

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"Small leaks may sink a ship."

That good old saying came to my mind the other day when one of my friends complained that the upkeep on her kitchen was very expensive.

"It isn't electricity or gas or the big equipment that seems to use up the pennies," she said in a most discouraged way. "It's the little things. When I selected my kitchen utensils a few years ago I selected good ones. I thought that if I bought sturdy pots and pans, the best electrical devices on the market, and well-made small utensils, they would last a lifetime. You should see them now, sitting dejectedly on my pantry shelves. How they have aged! Chipped enamelware, broken glassware, cracked wooden bowls, rusty skillets bent aluminum. Really, Aunt Sammy, young housewives should be warned that in a short time old age will come to even the handsomest pots and pans and new ones must be purchased. Egg beaters just will go back on me, measuring cups and baking dishes will crack, knives will grow dull and lose their handles, and wires for electric attachments will pull out and have to be fixed every little while."

A dreadful picture, I thought to myself. No wonder the pennies escape in that kitchen. There should be a society for the prevention of cruelty to cooking utensils. They never know, when they come bright, shining and beautiful from the store what kind of treatment they are in for. They simply have to trust to the cook's tender mercies and do the best they can under the circumstances. My experience has generally been, however, that they give long service if they are used and cared for properly, but that they repay careless treatment by becoming inefficient and wearing out long before their time.

Do you suppose a few simple facts about good care and proper use of kitchen tools might help? And would young housekeepers like to learn the different treatments required by different materials? Perhaps they need to know.

Take enamelware, for example. The processing of enameling is a very old art. Porcelain enamel has the same composition as glass and is fused on a base of steel. Enamelware kettles and pots today come in many colors to match the color schemes of our cheerful kitchens. Will good enamelware chip? Yes, even the best of it will, if it receives a blow or is dropped. But if it is treated with care it lasts a long time. Keep it clean with hot water and suds, don't scrape it or let food burn on it. If food sticks to the pan, soak it or add soda to the warm water. In a stubborn case of sticking, bring the water to a boil in the utensil. Cold water added to a hot pan is likely to be hard on the enamel coating.

Then there are the baking dishes of glass or earthenware. Clean these by washing in hot water and soap, rinsing in clear hot water and drying with a clean towel. They should never be quickly heated or cooled because sudden changes of temperature are likely to crack them. Manufacturers of glass baking dishes guarantee their products against breakage in the heat of the oven, but they also add certain words of caution that it pays to abide by. After all we mustn't expect the impossible of a material like glass. Never place it directly over the flame. When it is hot never handle it with a wet cloth and never let it come in contact with water or cold metal. Of course, a sharp blow will break glassware, even of the sturdiest make. If food adheres to a glass or earthenware baking dish, remove it with gritty scouring powder or very fine steel wool.

Tin is an inexpensive material that most of us have among our kitchen pieces. But many people don't know that tin should not be scoured. Surprising as it may sound before considering the matter, tarnish on tin protects it. Scouring may eventually wear the tin down to the iron or steel surface underneath. Simply wash your tins in hot soapy water, rinse them in hot clear water and dry them thoroughly. A tin utensil that has food dried on it may be covered with a weak solution of soda, heated for a few minutes, and then washed. Scraping scratches tin and may expose the surface underneath. Never mind if tin grows dark with use. It is more efficient that way.

Before I forget, let me say a word or two about electrical equipment. Small electric appliances such as toasters, irons, and percolators last longer if they are kept clean, but they must be cleaned carefully. Devices like percolators containing electric elements should never be immersed in dishwater. The nickel surface may be cleaned by rubbing first with a damp and then a dry cloth. And the inside? Wash it with warm water.

Then those cords that caused Letitia so much worry. They won't need to be repaired very often if they are treated sensibly and kindly. They last longer if they are not twisted. When not in use it is a good idea to hang them up instead of twisting them in a roll and pushing them into a drawer or an odd corner. When disconnecting your toaster or waffle iron, always remember to pull on the plug rather than on the wire. Those directions that come with your new electric piece, are worth reading carefully and keeping safely in your kitchen file or scrap book. If things go wrong you can always turn to them for reference.

Shall I say something about aluminum? So many of you write and ask me questions about this metal. Cooking utensils made from aluminum are either stamped from sheet aluminum or cast in mold. The latter is known as cast aluminum and is thicker and heavier than the sheet utensils. Both kinds are rust proof and splendid conductors of heat. Acid brightens aluminum, alkalis attack it. So avoid soaps and scouring powders containing alkalis if you want to keep your utensils in good condition. Avoid sal soda, caustic soda, potash, lye and ammonia. Wash aluminum with hot water and a good soap and, if it must be scoured, use steel wool or some of the good preparations on the market for cleaning it.

Of course all housewives who cook with aluminum have noticed that it turns dark when cooking with soda or salt and becomes bright if tomatoes, rhubarb or some other acid substance is cooked in it. When anyone tells you that unkind story about this being an indication that aluminum is not a safe cooking material, you can laugh.

Since Letitia mentioned those cracked wooden bowls of hers, I suppose I should mention them before I go. Wood is such a humble material that you may never have thought it needed special care. But it does. Do not wash that new chopping bowl of yours in water until it has been greased with hot fat or lard. If you do, it may crack across the center. After a thorough greasing, it is ready to have warm water poured into it and the temperature gradually increased by adding hot water.

Tomorrow I will answer some questions. And then I'll describe a delicious Sunday dinner that will suit this chilly weather we are having. Did you ever hear of that old German dish, baked sauerkraut and apple? I never knew how it was made until I talked to the Recipe Lady the other day. As soon as she described it, I said, "That is what we will have for our Sunday Dinner."

Friday: "Questions and Answers and a Sunday Dinner Menu."

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